

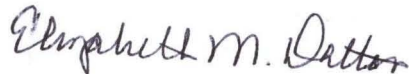
**Beyond the Painting:  
Humanism in Renaissance Art**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499) and Senior Research Project (HIST 440)

by

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Abstract:

During the Fall 2009 Virginia B. Ball Center immersive project, *Art in Sight*, I learned a lot about art and how people respond to it, especially high school students. Art and museums can be intimidating to students who do not understand how they are supposed to react to art. *Art in Sight* is a Web site written, designed and built in cooperation with Ball State University Museum of Art by students at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry to help high school art and humanities students take a closer look at, appreciate, and understand art. My thesis, *Beyond the Painting: Humanism in Renaissance Art*, is an accompanying Web site that takes a deeper look into the European Renaissance and the history that can be viewed through art. My focus will be on three different paintings from Ball State University Museum of Art: *Portrait of a Lady*, *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, and *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of Supper at Emmaus*. *Beyond*, accompanied by three famous Renaissance paintings with similar subject matter: *Mona Lisa*, *The Entombment*, and *The Arnolfini Portrait*. The purpose of the Web site is to provide a more in-depth history of the Renaissance, an important era for art history, than *Art in Sight* can provide, yet still keep the focus on high school students. My thesis includes a section for each of the three areas the chosen paintings represent: portrait, religion, and still life. In addition, there are two more sections that generally define the Renaissance and provide information on other disciplines that made contributions to society during the Renaissance. *Beyond the Painting* will be linked to *Art in Sight's* timeline page to make it easily accessible for students.

Acknowledgements:

- I would like to thank Elizabeth Dalton for advising me through my thesis and helping me with brainstorming, writing, and editing.
- I would like to thank Dr. Anthony Edmonds for advising me and overseeing my thesis.
- I would like to thank Tania Said for suggesting works of art from Ball State University Museum of Art to use in my thesis and helping in my research.
- I would like to thank Loretta Smith for taking the photo I used in my website.

# **Beyond the Painting**

(artoftherenaissance.weebly.com)

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# ***Beyond the Painting***

## **Annalise Hartley's History and Honors Senior Thesis**

### **Introduction**

I started my thesis in tandem with my fall 2009 semester at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry where I worked on the project *Art in Sight*. *Art in Sight* is a website for high school art and humanities students which is designed to help them take a closer look at and understand art using objects from Ball State University Museum of Art. My thesis, compatible with *Art in Sight*, focuses on one of the most important aspects of art history. The decision to make a website devoted to the Renaissance was due to the fact that it is an area that interests me personally, and it is an important era of art history that warranted further exploration than the timeline section of *Art in Sight* could provide. The goal of my thesis, titled *Beyond the Painting* (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com>), is to provide more in-depth historical information on a specific movement or period in art history, and the resulting website is designed to provide supplementary information to *Art in Sight* if students wish to further explore the Renaissance.

### **Choosing the Art**

Ball State University Museum of Art was the main resource for this project because its objects were used in the *Art in Sight* project and it also has excellent examples of Renaissance art. Just because an artist's work is not famous does not mean that he or she did not make an important contribution to art. This is something I wanted my thesis to show. After looking at the Renaissance art in the collection, I selected three different paintings: *Portrait of a Lady*, *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, and *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond*. *Portrait of a Lady* by Domenico Puligo, 1525, is an excellent example of the typical



Renaissance portrait in both style and subject matter. *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, by Simone Pignoni, 1635/1655, exhibited a subject matter that was commonly seen in Renaissance religious art. *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* by Pieter Aertsen, 1551/1553, not only has an exceptional still life table scene, but it depicts a religious story in the background.

To inspire comparison and contrast, more famous, yet similar works of art are displayed alongside the less well-known objects from Ball State University Museum of Art in each section of the website in order to show the worth of both works of art. History studied through art is not only something available in famous paintings, but is just as prevalent in many works of art created in the time period. By comparing masterpieces that nearly anyone would recognize with the paintings of artists who are less famous today but accomplished in their own time, students will be able to see the influence both had on their time period, and, in turn, the influence of the time period on them. The plan was to find a similar painting to match each of the ones I had chosen from BSU Museum of Art. I decided to use *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, 1503/1506, *The Entombment* by Raphael, 1507, and *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan Van Eyck, 1434. *Mona Lisa* is one of the most famous portraits ever made and an obvious example of Renaissance art. The subject matter and composition of *Mona Lisa* is similar to *Portrait of a Lady*, which makes them easy to compare. *The Entombment* was a more difficult choice, but it depicted a different, yet equally popular religious story in the Renaissance that contrasts nicely with the story alluded to in the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*. Lastly, despite the fact that *The Arnolfini Portrait* is a portrait, the careful and distinct painting of the background exemplifies the style and skill of still life painters. Jan van Eyck is a well-known Northern Renaissance artist whose work fits in well with the discussion of still life.

## **Finding a Theme**

Once I decided which works of art I wanted to use, I organized them into categories: portrait, religion, and still life. The focus on each of those subjects would be on the art and the social context in which each object was made during the Renaissance period. As I did more research and began writing my rough drafts, I realized that humanism was an important aspect of all of these genres. The focus in art, literature, and philosophy shifted from heaven in the Middle Ages to the individual during the Renaissance. That focus showed up many times in my research and the works of art themselves, so I used that as the connecting theme throughout my thesis.

The portraits are the most obvious example of humanism as the focus of the painting is an individual. With the rise of the middle class, portraits were no longer restricted to royalty and religious figures, but decorated the walls of many middle class merchants as well. Portraiture celebrated not only the individual, but the average individual in the Renaissance. Religious art was confronted with a shift in setting as the Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance. Religious figures were no longer portrayed in heavenly backgrounds with glowing crowns of gold, but were seen in an earthy setting and the figures themselves were painted or sculpted in the image of man. Religious art of this time moved towards depicting the human aspect of saints and religious figures, which made them more relatable to the faithful patrons of the church.

Humanism in still life and much other Northern Renaissance art can be found in nature and the physical form. Great attention was paid to the details in the appearance and shape of people, animals, and objects. New techniques that dealt with light, shadow, and perspective were also used to make the figures and objects in a painting appear as realistic as possible. This attention to natural detail was humanism at work in the Northern Renaissance.



## **Research and Writing**

Before I even began writing, I started making web pages and working on a design in Weebly. A site plan was drawn on paper, and after some rewriting, I ended up with a home page, a general Renaissance page, a page for each of my three sections--“portrait,” “religion,” “still life,”--and a resources page. The Renaissance page is where the time period is explained and some details defined, such as the difference between Italian and Northern Renaissance. While writing my rough drafts, which can be seen in the appendix, I wanted to add more background information about other disciplines that were important in their own right and may have influenced art during the Renaissance and that still relate to art. These disciplines include philosophy, literature, and science. The Renaissance page seemed a good place to put that information, but it was crowded and out of place, so a new page was made called “Beyond Art,” where the information on other aspects of the Renaissance would be briefly explained.

Once the pages’ templates had been decided, it was time to start writing rough drafts for my content. Fall 2009 semester I had checked out several books from Bracken Library and used those as the basis of my research. Spring 2010 semester’s research focused more specifically on the object and docent files from the Ball State University Museum of Art where I found specific information on each painting used on the website as well as information about the artist and the historical context put together by museum staff and docents. Information on the other, more famous works of art was found through the websites for the museums where those paintings are on display. To round off my research, I used art reference and history books that assisted with the writing of the “Renaissance” and “Beyond Art” pages. The goal of organizing my writing this way is to draw in the adolescent readers and provide important and basic information useful to them in their academic careers.



Over the course of several weeks during spring 2010 semester, I wrote six or seven drafts of the three main content pages of the website. I organized my information by introducing the paintings and then going into the cultural context in which they were made. Large photographs of each of the paintings discussed are displayed at the top of each page, so it is easy for the reader to refer to them. Connections are made to other sections of the website as often as possible through links, and each page concludes with a summary of why that specific style of art was important to the time period. I added links and references to other objects in BSU Museum of Art in the text, as well as links to each photograph. Links are also made to the museum's website and *Art in Sight* to keep those resources easily accessible. I wanted all of my pages to interlink as much as possible to make it easy for students to go back to information previously stated and help them make as many connections as possible. The navigation of the site is step-like as it walks the viewer through each page in order, but the links allow the reader to go back and forth in a more web-like pattern to see how each section is connected with the others.

### **The Finished Product**

Each section is important to the overall function of the website. The home page (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com>) welcomes the viewers to the site and describes its uses and navigation. The home page is also the first impression a visitor has of the website, and it must draw him or her into the rest of the website, which was a difficult task to accomplish.

"Renaissance" (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com/renaissance.html>) defines what exactly the Renaissance is and the classical values it is based upon. Italian Renaissance and Northern Renaissance are also distinguished from each other, as these terms oftentimes can be confusing for students.

“Portrait” (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com/portrait.html>) focuses the most on humanism and it is defined here for the reader. Characteristics of Renaissance portraits are discussed through the examples of *Portrait of a Lady* and *Mona Lisa*. Reference is made to the rising middle class and the important role they played in the development of Renaissance art. Science and mathematics are also discussed in relation to artistic techniques that are seen in both of the paintings.

“Religion” (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com/religion.html>) focuses mainly on the change in how religion was viewed from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, such as the change of setting in religious art from heavenly to earthly. The style of religious art in depicting figures more realistically is included, as well as the Church’s use of art as a medium to renew the faith of its patrons. Other depictions of Saint Catherine in Ball State University Museum of Art are also mentioned.

“Still Life” (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com/still-life.html>) is primarily about the genre of still life that was created during the Northern Renaissance. Style and technique of the painters are discussed as well as the trends with still life painting and how it evolved into a genre.

“Beyond Art” (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com/beyond-art.html>), the last information section, focuses on three main sections of advancements in the Renaissance outside of art: science and medicine, literature and literacy, and politics and philosophy. “Science and Medicine” discusses some of the new theories, inventions, and technologies brought to light during the era. “Literature and Literacy” focuses on the invention of the printing press that made books widely available and changed the literacy rate of the European population. Finally, “Politics and Philosophy” details *The Prince* by Machiavelli and the philosophies derived from



it, such as the balance of morality and politics used to rectify the problems facing governments at this time. The last section is a list of my references and credit for the photos used on the site, titled "Resources" (<http://artoftherenaissance.weebly.com/resources.html>).

### **What I Learned**

I learned a lot working on this project. For one, the technical side of putting a website together was something I had never done before first hand. Most of what I learned about the process was from working on *Art in Sight*, but as I did not build the website myself, it was a challenge. I had to make a lot of aesthetic choices in how the website would look, and consider how it would be navigated. The most trouble I encountered was figuring out what picture to use as a banner that would fit in the pixel space yet not clash with the images of the art. I tried a number of ideas, such as Renaissance architecture, tapestries, and close ups of other art work, but nothing fit well. Upon suggestion from my advisor, I had a friend, Loretta Smith, take photographs of the internal and external architecture of Ball State University Museum of Art that I used as the banner.

In addition to all of the new skills I encountered with the technological side of building a website, I learned more about Renaissance art and humanism this semester. I knew humanism was an important concept during the Renaissance, but I did not realize that it affected so much of what the Renaissance produced, whether that be art, literature, or scientific discoveries. Man as the ideal was a theme that was reiterated in nearly all the books I read for my research, and I found it easy to apply to all three sections of my thesis. I also learned about how classicism inspired Renaissance artists in specific instances. For example, Roman portraits on coins inspired Renaissance portraiture, many literary works hark back to Greek and Roman classics, and the attention to anatomical detail in painting and sculpture is inspired by classic statues and art.



One of the most useful things I learned on both this project and *Art in Sight* was how to write for a high school audience. My thesis is a little more difficult than the material I wrote for the timeline section of *Art in Sight*, but I still had to keep my main audience in mind and make sure what I was writing was easy to understand for that age level. I also had to pay attention to how my information was coming together. I was careful not to repeat information, but instead link it to other portions of the website, and to keep explanations of other disciplines that affected art brief yet informational. Some of the most tedious work was figuring out what information went where. Discussion of various disciplines outside of art began on the “Portrait” page before moving to the “Renaissance” page, but it finally found a spot in the “Beyond Art” page, which was created for that purpose.

Making this website for my thesis has been quite an enlightening experience. It has definitely given me the patience and the skill to condense large amounts of information into several short yet purposeful paragraphs that fit on a website. My further study of the Renaissance for this project has been interesting and fulfilling, especially as I began making the connections with history and art that I hope high school students using this site will make as well. I want them to realize that the choices of the artists are often influenced by the context of the time period in which the art was made, for that is something that I have seen over and over in my work. In all actuality, I have probably learned just as much doing my research as I hope students will in reading my website.

# Humanism in Renaissance Art

Take another look at the Renaissance through [Ball State University Museum of Art](#). What is it that makes the Renaissance so important in art history? What kind of art was made in the Renaissance? How was art relevant to the ideals of the time?

This website offers answers to these questions through three genres of art that illustrate the contributions made to the art world and history during the Renaissance. Each of the sections offers a work of art from Ball State University Museum of Art as well as a famous painting in the same genre or style.

- [Portrait](#) provides a look at individuality as portrayed in the Renaissance through humanism and classical values.
- [Religion](#) takes a look at the significant changes in religious art and the views of the Church from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance.
- [Still Life](#) focuses on the creation of the still life genre in Northern Renaissance countries and contributions these countries made to the art world.

My name is Annalise Hartley. This website is my Senior Honors and History Thesis for my undergraduate degree at Ball State University and was inspired by the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry's immersive learning project, [Art in Sight](#).



Special thanks to Ball State University Museum of Art



# What is the Renaissance?

The Renaissance is a period of rebirth in Europe beginning in the early 15th century. It is characterized by a rediscovery of Greek and Roman classical ideals. Science, art, literature, religion, philosophy, and medicine all saw study and advancements influenced by classical learning.

Classicism, as Marilyn Stokstad writes, is inspired by the Greeks and Romans through their art, literature, and history, and is the effort to produce art, literature, or architecture in these ancient styles. There are three general concepts that characterize classic ideals: humanism—an ideal based on the human form; rationalism—reason over emotion; and idealism—portraying nature in the universal ideal rather than actual detail. Though all of these are important aspects of the classical ideals seen in Renaissance art (Stokstad 128), humanism is the one that will be focused on in each section of this website.

The word "renaissance" literally means "rebirth." Coming out of the Dark Ages, Europe would develop new technology, new philosophy, and new theories. In addition, Europeans learned of new continents. The middle class was rising in wealth and status, and some prominent families, such as the Medici, became economic rulers of their Italian city-states through banking and commerce. Noble lineage was slowly being replaced by economic power backed by mercenary armies instead of the feudal allegiance of medieval knights. Patronage of the arts was a tool of the merchant class to show their newly acquired status (Stokstad 620).

Many areas other than art hosted breakthroughs, discoveries, and innovative new ideas that would change Europe over the course of the Renaissance. Information on some of those areas can be viewed at [Beyond Art](#).

The Renaissance was divided into two main geographical areas; Italian and Northern.

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## Italian Renaissance

The Italian Renaissance (1400--1600) centers on the Italian city-states, especially Venice and Florence, and was influenced by wealthy middle class families like the Medici. Art flourished with new methods and techniques. The Italian Renaissance produced some of the most famous painters and sculptors we recognize today, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael, Titan, Pignoni, and Puligo are some famous names, to mention a few.



## **Northern Renaissance**

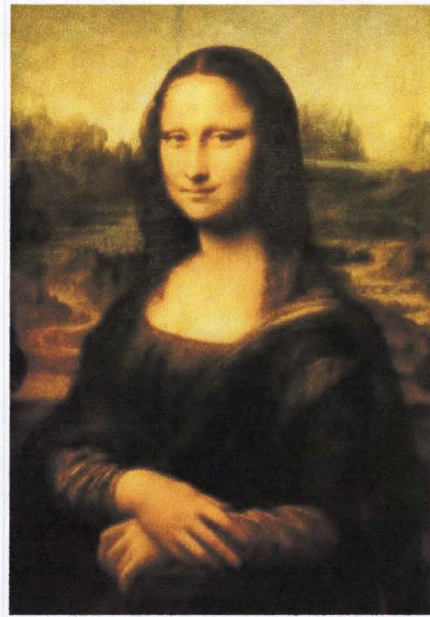
Independently of the Italians, the countries of Northern Europe, most notably Germany, the Netherlands, France, England, and Poland experienced their own cultural rebirth by revisiting the classical traditions, but even more importantly, nature. The Northern Renaissance (c. 1400-1600) is notable for the use of oil paint and the first true landscapes. The Northern Renaissance produced artists such as Jan Van Eyck, Bosch, Holbein, Dürer, and Aertsen.

Artists of the German Renaissance used techniques such as prints, woodcuts, and engravings as outlets of artistic expression as well (Carol Strickland and John Boswell 42).

## Portrait



*Portrait of a Lady* by Domenico Puligo, Ball State University Museum of Art



*Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, Louvre, Paris

These two paintings are similar in terms of subject and pose, as well as their excellent portrayals of humanism in Renaissance portraits. The identities of both the women portrayed above are unknown to us, but each has a distinct personality that is characteristic of the Renaissance and of humanism. The young woman in Domenico Puligo's painting is clearly deep in thought, contemplating some unknown issue while da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* stares straight at the viewer with a secretive smile that has intrigued historians and art lovers for centuries.

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The focus of most art, literature, politics, religion, and science during the Renaissance shifted from God to man. Along with the rediscovery of Greek and Roman classical ideals through classic art and literature was the rediscovery of man as an important figure beside whom all else was measured. This focus on man and his abilities through classical influence became known as humanism.

Humanism of the Renaissance, born out of the Italian city-states in the late 14th century, influenced men to look at Rome and Greece not as golden ages long past, but as precedents on which to build their own societies. As Strickland and Boswell write in *The Annotated Mona Lisa*, humanists were characterized by their learning and devotion to the classical. The term soon became associated with an array of studies, including language, rhetoric, history, philosophy, and poetry (Strickland and Boswell 32).

Man and his abilities were valued in Renaissance Europe. The greatness of a culture was measured by the greatness of the individual. The Renaissance produced many multi-talented men who contributed to and learned from art and many other fields, such as science and philosophy.



As stated in *The Portrait in the Italian Renaissance*, ancient Roman life was a great inspiration to many humanists, and one of the things that intrigued them most was Roman portraiture, most notably seen in busts and medals. Renaissance artists began reproducing art in this style, creating portraits in metal medallions and profile busts (Pope-Hennessy 64, 71).

As the portrait began to appear, it was seen as more than a mere likeness of a sitter; each was a representation of that person. For example, an artist by the name of Hans Holbein the Younger was commissioned to paint a portrait of Sir Thomas More. Holbein considered the portrait a way to render a man immortal. Not only would his features be immortalized, but his will, desires, and virtues were recorded as well. When Holbein prepared to paint More, he did not just consider his appearance, but his personality, accomplishments, background, career, and morals. A Renaissance artist had to know the sitter in order to portray him properly (Pope-Hennessy 92-100). One of Holbein's portraits, [\*Erasmus of Rotterdam\*](#), is on display at Ball State University Museum of Art.

The portrait was a genre in which to display the importance of man, and not just famous men. The middle class was rising in wealth and influence during the Renaissance. Merchants and bankers, such as the Medici family of Florence, gained political and social standing to rival the nobility. Their new-found positions made the middle class the perfect patrons for art as they embraced the new concept of humanism.

The *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by the philosopher Pico della Mirandola, a contemporary text dealing with Christian humanism, states that "thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shall prefer." As Rabil mentions in his essay, the appeal to break out of their social class restrictions and mold their own lives was great to many of the more wealthy middle class citizens. They had more opportunities for education, and their economic success allowed them to become patrons of the arts. Art was no longer made solely for the glory of the Church, but also the edification of man (Rabil 45).

Since art was supported and produced by the newly educated and wealthy middle class, the subjects were also from that social stratification. Both of the portraits on this page portray a woman of some wealth. According to Ball State University Museum resources, the sitter in *Portrait of a Lady* by Domenico Puligo, 1525, is wearing expensive clothing and a stylish *balzo* that was only seen on women of the wealthier classes. The jewelry she wears also denotes her status as the wife of wealthy merchant or aristocrat (Jones 1-2). The *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, 1503/1506, also wears clothing befitting a wealthier class, but interestingly enough she lacks the adornments or setting of most upper class portraits (Stokstad 664-665).

The developments in [science and mathematics](#) also had an effect on art. Perspective was a new technique used by Renaissance artists to create depth in paintings. Paintings were no longer the flat scenes common in medieval art, but were multidimensional with the background receding into space. This can be easily seen in both paintings. In *Portrait of a Lady*, the window next to the sitter shows a small castle that appears far away because of its size in relation to the subject. In *Mona Lisa*, the objects in the landscape become smaller as the eyes travel to the top of the canvas. This gives the illusion that the landscape is receding into space behind the figure.

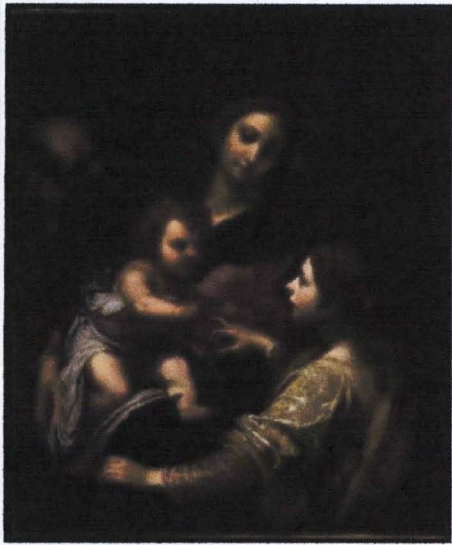


The use of light and shadow was also used to give more depth and dimension to paintings, making figures appear more lifelike in the style of the classics. *Portrait of a Lady* shows heavy shadowing behind the lady and under the curtain that alludes to space between the figure and the wall. The shadows on her face and dress show the light is falling from the left side of the painting onto the figure. In *Mona Lisa*, the light still comes from the left, but is slightly more direct as evidenced by the shadows on the right side of her body, which are not as deep as the ones seen in *Portrait of a Lady*. The light is also higher up in *Mona Lisa*, as the further down the canvas the eye travels, the darker the shadows appear.

Pyramid configuration is another technique used in Renaissance art. It can be seen in the *Mona Lisa* and *Portrait of a Lady*. Both sitters' bodies are arranged in poses that emphasize triangular composition, with their hands folded flat at the bottom forming the base and their heads forming the top angle of the triangle. The sight lines lead to the face and, perhaps, the hands (Strickland and Boswell 32-33).

Both of the paintings above are typical of Renaissance portraits. The upper half of each figure is shown with her hands placed in her lap, and her whole body turned slightly to the side. Both women are dressed in the style of the middle to upper class and have similar postures. Sitting next to a window is a common pose for women in Renaissance portraits that would become a continuing trend in portrait art, and though the figure in *Mona Lisa* is not next to a window, there is a landscape behind her. The *Mona Lisa* and *Portrait of a Lady* are portraits that bring personality and individuality to the subjects, focusing on the human aspect that is so important in Renaissance art.

# Religion



*Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* by Simone Pignoni, Ball State University Museum of Art



*The Entombment* by Raphael, Galleria Borghese, Rome

The *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Simone Pignoni, 1635/1655, is a depiction of a Biblical story that was well-known and much reproduced in the Italian Renaissance. This painting is typical of religious paintings in the Renaissance. Likewise, the portrayal of *The Entombment*, by Raphael, 1507, is also a well-known religious story, this time depicted by well-known painter, Raphael. Both of these paintings could have been commissioned by the Church and used as examples of piety to the Christian community of Europe.

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During the Middle Ages, religious art was generally unsigned since the artist worked for the glory of God and not his personal glory. In the Renaissance, an artist's paintings were a way of honoring his religion and showing his devotion. Even with the [scientific](#) and astronomical advancements made at this time that sometimes challenged the views of the Church, religion still thrived. The pope was a major power in Europe, acting as a politician as much as a religious leader. The Roman Catholic Church was a major patron of the arts, often commissioning paintings and sculptures to glorify the house of God. According to Albert Rabil, Jr., in his article on civic humanism, the growth of [humanism](#) also influenced the Church as it encouraged learning in all major fields of study and helped provide the means to do so. The Renaissance gave way to a Church that was more open and accepting than it had been in the Middle Ages. It was influenced by the ideals of the time and, in turn, influenced art. The growth of the middle class, especially in Italy, meant many positions in the Church were filled by important merchant families (Rabil, Jr. 33-35).

During the Italian Renaissance the portrayal of religious scenes changed. Artists of the Middle Ages depicted religious scenes as set in the heavens, with golden backgrounds, circles of light, and flat undefined figures. Artists of the Renaissance not only developed a new, more accurate depiction of anatomy, but settings in paintings were earthly, putting a new emphasis on man. As



seen in *The Entombment* by Raphael, 1507, the setting is clearly earth with the grass and sky easily distinguishable in the background. Even the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* by Simone Pignoni, 1635/1655, shows the figures surrounded by darkness and drapery instead of the golden glow seen in many earlier religious paintings.

With the advancements made in science and medicine, it was not only portraits that offered more precise portrayals of the human form. The precise detail of the human body seen in holy figures in religious Renaissance paintings is another testament to the rise of humanism at this time. Devotion to the Church remained intact, but was now paired with belief in the abilities of man. The paintings above show devotion to anatomical detail. *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* shows the plump curves of the Christ child and the sharp features of both Catherine and Mary. *The Entombment* shows details in the muscles of the figures as they strain to hold Christ, as well as the defined but limp form of Christ himself. Raphael's painting clearly shows the influence of Michelangelo in the careful depiction of anatomy. It was common in the Renaissance for apprentices to study with master artists and learn to paint in their style, which is why similarities are so often seen between artists (Fiore).

In the Middle Ages, biblical stories were often depicted in art so they could be understood by the illiterate masses. Though literacy increased, this art trend endured throughout the Renaissance. According to Albert Rabil, Jr., the Church encouraged paintings and sculptures of saints to inspire the faithful (36-38). In both paintings above, important religious scenes are depicted.

As stated in Ball State University Museum sources, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* illustrates the dream St. Catherine of Alexandria had wherein the Christ child presented her with a ring, making her his celestial spouse. This scene was popularly portrayed with the Virgin Mary and Joseph to complete the Holy family. They were often referred to as the "earthly trinity," a phrase in itself that emphasizes humanism. Like many depictions of saints, Catherine is painted with the object of her martyrdom, a barely visible spiked wheel in the lower left hand corner (Gardner). Another portrayal of Saint Catherine can be seen in the [West Gallery](#) of Ball State University Museum of Art in *Saint John the Baptist with Saint Lawrence on the reverse*; *Saint John the Evangelist with Saint Catherine on the reverse*, an altarpiece thought to be commissioned for King Phillip II of Spain by Marten de Vos.

The second painting, *The Entombment*, also known as *The Deposition*, is actually a portrayal of neither. With the cave of the Entombment on the left and the cross in the distance on the right, this is a transition scene between two often depicted events in Christian history. By painting this moment between two famous scenes, Raphael is able to display a flowing history and not merely a set of scenes. The lack of tell-tale golden halos also firmly establishes the people in the painting as humans on earth carrying Christ.

As the Renaissance drew to a close and the Protestant Reformation and subsequent Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church began, art continued to play an important role. Protestant artists' work became more secular while the Church commissioned paintings of glorious depictions of saints, such as Catherine, to draw people back to Catholicism.



## Still Life



*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* by Pieter Aertsen, Ball State University Museum of Art, Muncie



*The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck, National Gallery, London

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* by Pieter Aertson, 1551/1553, is a Northern Renaissance painting displaying a still life table with a biblical scene in the background. The second painting, *Arnolfini Wedding*, is not technically a still life, but is one of the best examples of Northern Renaissance still life technique. Still life artwork features inanimate objects as the focus of the work of art. While the *Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan Van Eyck, 1434, does indeed focus on two human figures, the detail and attention to the rest of the room and the objects in it are just as likely to draw the viewer's attention as the couple.



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Humanism affected the Northern countries just as it affected Italy. According to Carol Strickland and John Boswell, along with humanist views came a renewed interest in the physical form and the natural world, in an attempt to visually record and reproduce nature through art. Artists took great care in depicting animals, plants, people, and objects. They used light and shadow, as seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, to give the objects of a painting three dimensions. Northern artists specialized in perspective techniques such as intuitive perspective where artists painted distant objects smaller and closer together, and aerial perspective, which made distant objects blurry and less colorful (Strickland and Boswell 32). Both of these techniques gave depth and dimension to Northern Renaissance paintings. For example, in the *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond*, the figures in the background are smaller, close together, and not depicted as sharply as the objects on the table. This gives the viewer the impression that the objects are further away from the viewer than the table.

These new methods in painting were influenced by the subject matter that was in demand at this time. As cities became more populous, the public became interested in secular art. Merchant and middle class patrons wanted to express personal and civic pride, but this did not mean that the Church was forgotten. Christianity still had a strong presence in Northern Renaissance Europe. The Church commissioned art to encourage renewed faith in their members and others.

Pieter Aertson, considered by many the “father of still life,” painted *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper of Emmaus Beyond* and other similar scenes where the influence of the Church is very evident. According to Ball State University Museum documents, the scene in the background is when Christ blesses the bread of his two apostles, Simon and Cleopas, after his resurrection. This scene is a re-enactment of the events of the [Last Supper](#), which was famously painted by Leonardo da Vinci. The objects on the table in the foreground also hold a religious significance. The lamb head represents Christ, the “Lamb of God.” Loaves of bread and fish recall how Christ fed many with only a few loaves of bread and some fish. Fruit, used to represent fertility in secular paintings, is shown here to represent the apple from the Garden of Eden and the subsequent need for Christ’s sacrifice for humanity’s sins. The rose, with its prominent thorns, also harkens to the Garden of Eden where roses did not have thorns until after man sinned. Onions and peas are staple foods of peasants, most often eaten during Lent, right before Christ’s resurrection, and lavender grew in the field where Christ was crucified. Every object in this painting was carefully chosen by the painter to further represent the story, seen in the background, of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection (Grimm 87).

As with the Italian Renaissance, individuality was very important. Artists began signing their work much more frequently. In fact, according to Susie Nash, because more artists signed their work during the Renaissance, more artists were recognized in this artistic period than any since the Greek and Roman periods. As seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, which is described in detail in *Northern Renaissance Art*, Jan van Eyck’s signature appears on the wall over the mirror in the background. Van Eyck did not simply sign his name, but worked the signature into the painting and made it part of the art (Nash 143).

As Marilyn Stokstad explains in *Art History*, a famous Dutch Northern Renaissance painter, Jan



van Eyck is well-known for his technique with oil paint, so much so that his patrons called it a science. Van Eyck's sharp and colorful images are built with many thin layers of oil glaze on a wooden panel. The brushstrokes are nearly invisible. This is most famously seen in the *Arnolfini Wedding*. The portrait is of an Italian merchant couple celebrating either their wedding or betrothal. Members of the wealthy merchant class were often the subject of non-still life paintings of the Northern Renaissance. Artists such as Van Eyck celebrated individuality and focused on the everyday world to render their subjects as realistically as possible.

Here Van Eyck uses ordinary objects as symbols, but unlike Aertson's work, the symbolism in the painting is both religious and secular. The positions of the figures, with the man near the window and the woman near the bed, denote their positions in society. The mirror in the background shows the couple's wealth, but also acts as the eye of God. Prayer beads on the wall, the image of St. Margaret carved into the chair, and the single burning candle all represent the couple's piety. The fruit is both fertility and the sin of man, and the dog represents both fidelity and wealth. All of these seemingly random objects have one, if not several, meanings and were intentionally placed there by the artist (Stokstad 599-601).

Both of these paintings are characteristic of the artists who made them. Pieter Aertson was well-known and praised for his still lifes that focused on religious symbolism to retell the stories of the Bible. Jan van Eyck was revolutionary in his use of oil paint and realistic depiction of figures. Both artists rely heavily on symbolism to give their paintings deeper meaning, and look to nature as well as common objects to give their figures depth, perspective, and realistic qualities. Aertson, Van Eyck, and many other artists of the Northern Renaissance were invaluable in developing still life as a genre and respected art form that focused on inanimate and nonhuman objects.

# Beyond Art

Breakthroughs, discoveries and innovative ideas were facets of life that changed Europe during the course of the Renaissance. A few of those include:

## Science and Medicine

Philosophers and scientists were looking for explanations to the mysteries of nature. New trains of thought, such as Copernicus' heliocentric theory, Galileo's study of astronomy, Paracelsus' new medical theories, as well as the inventions of new instruments and methods spurred the Scientific Revolution (Goodrick-Clarke). The microscope and telescope allowed scientists to peer into the worlds of the infinitesimal and immeasurable alike. Science was seen as an extension of philosophy, the two working together to explain the world's mysteries.

The advances of science led to advances in medicine as well. The study of human anatomy was one that intrigued many great men of the time, including Leonardo da Vinci. Studies of the human anatomy, such as da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, led to a better understanding of the human body and thus, better ways to treat it and represent it in art.

## Literature and Literacy

The Gutenberg printing press was one of the most important inventions of the Renaissance. It was pivotal in bringing the printed word to the masses. Books before this time were handwritten and extremely expensive, and their use was often limited to the clergy and those who could afford them. The printing press made books available to the public, most notably, the middle class. People were now able to seek their own knowledge, and with the printing of the King James Bible, their own religious interpretations.

## Politics and Philosophy

Niccolo Machiavelli's political philosophy as presented in *The Prince* introduced a new way of looking at government. Machiavelli was stigmatized as a man of the devil who taught evil with his new look at government, but others saw him as a revolutionary. According to Maureen Ramsay, Machiavelli wrote his philosophy to be practical and applicable. *The Prince* was intended to be used to solve the problems facing Renaissance Europe when Machiavelli lived. Machiavelli is known for phrases and concepts such as "the end justifies the means," that balance morality and politics (Ramsay 98-112). As with most works of the Renaissance, *The Prince*, placed control in the hands of man.



## Photo Credits

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## **A Special Thank You to:**

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Tania Said and Ball State University Museum of Art Staff for allowing me access to their files and archives.

Loretta Smith for taking the banner photograph.

My fellow Art in Sight students who took the time to look at and help me with my thesis project.



## Draft 1

### Portrait (Portrait of a Lady / Mona Lisa)

I chose these two paintings in particular because of their similarities in subject and pose, as well as their excellent portrayals of humanism in Renaissance portraits. Both of the women portrayed above are unknown, but both hold a depth to them that is characteristic of the Renaissance and the very basis of humanism. The young woman in Puligo's painting is clearly deep in thought, contemplating some unknown issue while da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* stares straight at the viewer with a secretive smile that has plagued historians for centuries.

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The new main focus of most art, literature, politics, religion, and science during the Renaissance was man. Along with the rediscovery of Greek and Roman classical ideals, was the rediscovery of man as an important figure and that which we measure all else. This focus on man and his abilities through classical influence became known as humanism.

Humanism of the Renaissance was born out of the Italian city-states in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and influenced men not to look to Rome and Greece as the golden ages long gone, but as precedents in which to mold their own societies. Humanists were characterized by their learning and devotion to the classical. Originally the term was merely describing a scholar, but soon became associated with an array of studies, including language, rhetoric, history, philosophy, and poetry. Politics was generally the one area a humanist was indifferent. Instead their focus centered on an area that came to be known as "liberal arts."

Man and his abilities were valued in Renaissance Europe. The greatness of a culture was only achieved through the greatness of the individual. The Renaissance saw many multi-talented men who contributed and learned from art and many other fields. Roman life was a great inspiration to many humanists, and one of the things that intrigued them most was Roman portraiture, most notably seen in busts and medals. Renaissance artists began reproducing art in this style, medals carved with profile and portrait busts.

As portraits gradually appeared in paintings, they were seen as more than a mere likeness of the sitter, they were a representation of that person. An artist by the name of Hans Holbein the Younger was commissioned to paint a portrait of Sir Thomas More. Holbein considered a portrait a way to render a man immortal, not only his features, but his will, desires, and virtues captured eternally on a canvas. When Holbein prepared to paint More, he did not just consider his appearance, but his personality, accomplishments, background, career, and morals. An artist had to really know the sitter in order to portray him properly.

Portraits were a medium in which to display the importance of man, and not just famous men. The middle class was rising in wealth and influence during the Renaissance. Merchants and bankers, like the Medici family of Florence, gained political and social standing to rival the nobility. Their new found positions made the middle class the perfect patrons for art as they embraced the new concept of humanism.



The *Oration on the Dignity of Man* states that “thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shall prefer.” The appeal to break out of their social class restrictions and mold their own lives was great to many of the more wealthy middle class citizens. They were becoming educated and produced a great many masterpieces in art and literature, to which they would be credited unlike the authorless work of the previous era. Art was no longer made solely for the glory of the Church, but also the glory of man.

Since art was being produced by the newly educated and wealthy middle class, the subjects were also from that social stratification. [Portrait of a Lady]

The Guttenberg printing press was one of the most important inventions of the Renaissance. It was pivotal in bringing the printed word to the masses. Books were previous handwritten and extremely expensive, usually only ever seen by monks or other religious figures. The printing press made books available to the public, most notably, the middle class. People were now able to seek their own knowledge, and with the printing of the King James Bible, their own interpretation of religion.

The Renaissance saw advancements in many other areas as well. Philosophers and scientists were looking for explanations to nature and natural phenomena outside of the Church. New trains of thought like Copernicus’ heliocentric theory, Galileo’s study of astronomy, Paracelsus’ new medical theories, as well as the inventions of new instruments and methods spurred the Scientific Revolution. The microscope and telescope allowed scientists to peer into the worlds of the infinitesimal and immeasurable alike. Science was seen as an extension of philosophy, the two working together to explain the world’s anomalies.

The advances of science led to advances in medicine as well. The study of human anatomy was one that intrigued many great men of the time, including Leonardo da Vinci. Studies of the human anatomy, like da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*, led to a better understanding of the human body and thus, better ways to treat it. Da Vinci’s talents did not stop there, but a number of his inventions included early models of machine guns, grenades, hang gliders, parachutes, and utility belts.

Science and mathematics also had an effect on art. Perspective was a new technique used by Renaissance artists to create depth in paintings. Paintings were no longer the flat scenes common in medieval art, but were multidimensional with the background receding into space away from the subject. The use of light and shadow was also used to give more depth and dimension to paintings, making figures appear more lifelike in the style of the classics. Pyramid configuration is another technique used in Renaissance art. It can be seen in the *Mona Lisa* and *Portrait of a Lady*, the triangular arrangement of their bodies, with their hands folded flat at the bottom of the canvases brings the focal point to their faces.



## Draft 2

### Portrait (Portrait of a Lady / Mona Lisa)

These two paintings were chosen because of their similarities in subject and pose, as well as their excellent portrayals of humanism in Renaissance portraits. Both of the women portrayed above are unknown, but each has a distinct personality that is characteristic of the Renaissance and the very basis of humanism. Puligo's *Portrait of a Lady* is clearly deep in thought, contemplating some unknown issue while da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* stares straight at the viewer with a secretive smile that has intrigued historians for centuries.

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The focus of most art, literature, politics, religion, and science during the Renaissance shifted from God to man. Along with the rediscovery of Greek and Roman classical ideals is the rediscovery of man as an important figure beside whom we measure all else. This focus on man and his abilities through classical influence became known as humanism(Stokstad).

Humanism of the Renaissance, born out of the Italian city-states in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century influenced men not to look to Rome and Greece as the golden ages long past, but as precedents in which to build their own societies. Humanists were characterized by their learning and devotion to the classical. Originally the term merely described a scholar, but soon became associated with an array of studies, including language, rhetoric, history, philosophy, and poetry.

Man and his abilities were valued in Renaissance Europe. The greatness of a culture was measured by the greatness of the individual. The Renaissance produced many multi-talented men who contributed and learned from art and many other fields, such as science and philosophy. Ancient Roman life was a great inspiration to many humanists, and one of the things that intrigued them most was Roman portraiture, most notably seen in busts and medals. Renaissance artists began reproducing art in this style, creating portraits in metal medallions and profile busts (Pope-Hennessy, p.64).

As the portrait began to appear, it was seen as more than a mere likeness of a sitter; each was a representation of that person. An artist by the name of Hans Holbein the Younger was commissioned to paint a portrait of Sir Thomas More. Holbein considered the portrait a way to render a man immortal. Not only would his features be immortalized, but his will, desired and virtues as well. When Holbein prepared to paint More, he did not just consider his appearance, but his personality, accomplishments, background, career, and morals. A Renaissance artist had to know the sitter in order to portray him properly (Whitlock).

Portraits were a medium in which to display the importance of man, and not just famous men. The middle class was rising in wealth and influence during the Renaissance. Merchants and bankers, such as the Medici family of Florence, gained political and social standing to rival the nobility. Their new-found positions made the middle class the perfect patrons for art as they embraced the new concept of humanism.



The *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, a contemporary text dealing with Christian humanism, states that “thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shall prefer.” The appeal to break out of their social class restrictions and mold their own lives was great to many of the more wealthy middle class citizens. They had more opportunities for education, and their economic success allowed them to become patrons of the arts. Art was no longer made solely for the glory of the Church, but also the glory of man (Whitlock).

Since art was being produced by the newly educated and wealthy middle class, the subjects were also from that social stratification. Both portraits portray a woman of some wealth. The sitter in *Portrait of a Lady* is wearing expensive clothing and a stylish turban that was only seen on women of the wealthier classes. The jewelry she wears also denotes her status as wealthy merchant or even aristocracy. The *Mona Lisa* as well is wearing clothing befitting of a wealthier class, but interestingly enough she lacks the adornments or setting of most upper class portraits (Object Files).

The developments in science and mathematics [embed link to Ren page] also had an effect on art. Perspective was a new technique used by Renaissance artists to create depth in paintings. Paintings were no longer the flat scenes common in medieval art, but were multidimensional with the background receding into space away from the subject. This can be easily seen in both paintings. In *Portrait of a Lady*, the window next to her shows a small castle that appears far away because of its size in relation to the lady. In *Mona Lisa*, the landscape behind her becomes smaller as it reaches the top of the canvas. This gives the illusion that the landscape is receding into space behind the figure. The use of light and shadow was also used to give more depth and dimension to paintings, making figures appear more lifelike in the style of the classics. *Portrait of a Lady* shows heavy shadowing behind the lady and under the curtain that makes the figure stand out away from the wall, and the shadows on her face and dress show the light is falling from the left side of the painting onto the figure. In *Mona Lisa*, the light still comes from the left, but is slightly more direct evident by the shadows on the right side of her body which are not as vast as the ones seen in *Portrait of a Lady*. The light is also higher up in *Mona Lisa*, as the further down the canvas the eye travels, the darker it appears. Pyramid configuration is another technique used in Renaissance art. It can be seen similarly in the *Mona Lisa* and *Portrait of a Lady*. The triangular arrangement of their bodies, with their hands folded flat at the bottom and their heads forming the top angle. The sight lines lead to the face and, perhaps, the hands (Strickland).

Both of the paintings above are typical of Renaissance portraits. The upper half of the figure is shown, her hands placed in her lap, her whole body turned slightly to the side. Both women are dressed in the style of the middle to upper class and have similar postures. Sitting next to a window is a common theme for women in Renaissance portraits, and though *Mona Lisa* is not next to a window, there is a landscape behind her.

The individuality that humanism prizes so highly is brought out in both of these portraits. Personality is revealed through the subjects faces, postures, and expressions, both invoking some sort of feeling on the part of the viewer. Puligo's gives his *Lady* a wistful, almost melancholy, expression that shows a deep thoughtfulness not common in portraits, especially of women, before this time (Docent File). Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece in particular is known for



inspiring feelings of serenity, tension, intelligence, and uneasiness all with one glance of an unknown woman. Her slight smile puzzles everyone who sees her and gives off an air of intelligence that is rarely conveyed in portraits before this era (Rorimer, p.223-224).

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### Draft 3

#### Portrait (Portrait of a Lady / Mona Lisa)

These two paintings are similar in terms of subject and pose, as well as their excellent portrayals of humanism in Renaissance portraits. The identities of both the woman portrayed above are unknown to us, but each has a distinct personality that is characteristic of the Renaissance and of humanism. The young woman in Puligo's painting is clearly deep in thought, contemplating some unknown issue while da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* stares straight at the viewer with a secretive smile that has intrigued historians and art lovers for centuries.

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The focus of most art, literature, politics, religion, and science during the Renaissance shifted from God to man. Along with the rediscovery of Greek and Roman classical ideals through classic art and literature is the rediscovery of man as an important figure beside whom we measure all else. This focus on man and his abilities through classical influence became known as humanism.

Humanism of the Renaissance, born out of the Italian city-states in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century influenced men to look at Rome and Greece not as golden ages long past, but as precedents on which to build their own societies. As Strickland and Boswell write in *The Annotated Mona Lisa*, humanists were characterized by their learning and devotion to the classical. Originally the term merely described a scholar, but soon became associated with an array of studies, including language, rhetoric, history, philosophy, and poetry (Strickland and Boswell, 32).

Man and his abilities were valued in Renaissance Europe. The greatness of a culture was measured by the greatness of the individual. The Renaissance produced many multi-talented men who contributed to and learned from art and many other fields, such as science and philosophy. As stated in *The Portrait in the Italian Renaissance*, ancient Roman life was a great inspiration to many humanists, and one of the things that intrigued them most was Roman portraiture, most notably seen in busts and medals. Renaissance artists began reproducing art in this style, creating portraits in metal medallions and profile busts (Pope-Hennessy, 64, 71).

As the portrait began to appear, it was seen as more than a mere likeness of a sitter; each was a representation of that person. For example, an artist by the name of Hans Holbein the Younger was commissioned to paint a portrait of Sir Thomas More. Holbein considered the portrait a way to render a man immortal. Not only would his features be immortalized, but his will, desires and virtues were recorded as well. When Holbein prepared to paint More, he did not just consider his appearance, but his personality, accomplishments, background, career, and morals. A Renaissance artist had to know the sitter in order to portray him properly (Pope-Hennessy, 92-100). One of Holbein's portraits, *Erasmus of Rotterdam*, is on display at Ball State University Museum of Art.

The portrait was a genre in which to display the importance of man, and not just famous men. The middle class was rising in wealth and influence during the Renaissance. Merchants and bankers, such as the Medici family of Florence, gained political and social standing to rival the



nobility. Their new-found positions made the middle class the perfect patrons for art as they embraced the new concept of humanism.

The *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by the philosopher Pico della Mirandola, a contemporary text dealing with Christian humanism, states that “thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shall prefer.” As Rabil mentions in his essay, the appeal to break out of their social class restrictions and mold their own lives was great to many of the more wealthy middle class citizens. They had more opportunities for education, and their economic success allowed them to become patrons of the arts. Art was no longer made solely for the glory of the Church, but also the edification of man (Rabil, 45).

Since art was supported and produced by the newly educated and wealthy middle class, the subjects were also from that social stratification. Both of the portraits on this page portray a woman of some wealth. According to Ball State University Museum resources, the sitter in *Portrait of a Lady* by Domenico Puligo, 1525, is wearing expensive clothing and a stylish balzo that was only seen on women of the wealthier classes. The jewelry she wears also denotes her status as the wife of a wealthy merchant or aristocrat (*Portrait of a Lady* Docent Files). The *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, 1503/1506, as well is wearing clothing befitting of a wealthier class, but interestingly enough she lacks the adornments or setting of most upper class portraits (Stokstad, 664-665).

The developments in science and mathematics [embed link to Ren page] also had an effect on art. Perspective was a new technique used by Renaissance artists to create depth in paintings. Paintings were no longer the flat scenes common in medieval art, but were multidimensional with the background receding into space. This can be easily seen in both paintings. In *Portrait of a Lady*, the window next to her shows a small castle that appears far away because of its size in relation to the subject. In *Mona Lisa*, the landscape behind her becomes smaller as it reaches the top of the canvas. This gives the illusion that the landscape is receding into space behind the figure.

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Pyramid configuration is another technique used in Renaissance art. It can be seen similarly in the *Mona Lisa* and *Portrait of a Lady*. Their bodies are arranged in a triangular shape, with their hands folded flat at the bottom forming the base and their heads forming the top angle of the triangle. The sight lines lead to the face and, perhaps, the hands (Strickland and Boswell, 32-33).

Both of the paintings above are typical of Renaissance portraits. The upper half of each figure is shown, her hands placed in her lap, her whole body turned slightly to the side. Both women are dressed in the style of the middle to upper class and have similar postures. Sitting next to a window is a common theme for women in Renaissance portraits that would become a continuing trend in portrait art, and though *Mona Lisa* is not next to a window, there is a landscape behind her. The *Mona Lisa* and *Portrait of a Lady* are portraits that bring personality and individuality to the subjects, focusing on the human aspect that is so important in Renaissance art.

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## Draft 1

### Religion (Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine / Entombment of Christ)

The *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* is a depiction of a biblical story that was well-known and much reproduced in the Italian Renaissance. This painting is very typical of religious paintings in the Renaissance, and a perfect example for this discussion. Likewise, the portrayal of the *Entombment* is also a well known religious story, this time depicted by the well known painter, Raphael. Both of these paintings could have been commissioned by the Church and used as examples of faithfulness to the Christian community of Europe.

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The Italian Renaissance experienced a change in the way religious scenes were portrayed. The Middle Ages depicted religious scenes as firmly rooted in the heavens, with golden backgrounds, circles of light, and flat undefined figures. The Renaissance not only saw a new, more accurate depiction of anatomy, but a setting that was earthly, putting man above all else. As seen in *The Entombment*, the setting is clearly earth with the grass and sky easily distinguishable in the background. Even the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* shows the figures surrounded by darkness instead of the golden glow seen in many earlier religious paintings.

With the advancements made in science and medicine, it wasn't only portraits that saw more precise portrayals of the human anatomy. Though depicted in human form previously, the precise detail of the human body seen in holy figures in religious Renaissance paintings is another testament to the rise of humanism at this time. Devotion to the church remained intact, but was now paired with faith in man.

During the Middle Ages, religious art was generally unsigned since the artist made it for the glory of God and not his personal glory. In the Renaissance, an artist's paintings were a way of expressing their religion and showing their devotion. Even with the scientific and astronomical advancements made at this time that sometimes challenged the views of the Church, religion still thrived. The papacy was a major power in Europe, acting as a politician as much as a religious leader. The Roman Catholic Church was a major patron of the arts, often commissioning paintings and sculptures to glorify the house of God. The growth of humanism also influenced the Church as they encouraged learning in all major field of study and helped provide the means to do so. The Renaissance saw a Church that was more open and influenced as much by the ideals of the time as it influenced art. The growth of the middle class, especially in Italy, meant the Church was under more of their influence as members of important merchant families secured positions in the Church.

In the Middle Ages, biblical stories were often depicted in art so they could be understood by the illiterate masses. Though literacy increased, the trend stayed throughout the Renaissance. The Church encouraged paintings and sculptures of saints to act as examples of faithful and pious lives. In both paintings above, important religious scenes are depicted.

The first illustrates the dream St. Catherine of Alexandria had where the Christ child presented her with a ring, making her his celestial spouse. This scene was popularly portrayed with the

Virgin Mary and Joseph to complete the Holy family. They were often referred to as the “earthly trinity” in an expression of humanism. Like many depictions of saints, Catherine is painted with the objects of her martyrdom, a barely visible spiked wheel in the lower left hand corner.

The second, *The Entombment*, also known as *The Deposition*, is actually a portrayal of neither. With the cave of the Entombment on the left and the cross in the distance on the right, this is a transition scene between two greatly depicted events in Christian history. By painting the progression of a scene, Raphael is able to display a flowing history and not merely a set of scenes. The lack of tell-tale golden halos also firmly plant the people in the painting as humans on earth carrying Christ, another show of humanist interests.

As the Renaissance drew to a close and the Protestant Reformation and consequential Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church began, art continued to play an important role. Protestant artists’ work became more secular while the Church commissioned paintings of glorious depictions of saints, like Catherine, to draw people back to Catholicism.



## Draft 2

### Religion (Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine / Entombment of Christ)

The *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Simone Pignoni is a depiction of a biblical story that was well-known and much reproduced in the Italian Renaissance. This painting is typical of religious paintings in the Renaissance, and a perfect example for this discussion. Likewise, the portrayal of the *Entombment* is also a well known religious story, this time depicted by the well known painter, Raphael. Both of these paintings could have been commissioned by the Church and used as examples of piety to the Christian community of Europe.

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During the Middle Ages, religious art was generally unsigned since the artist worked for the glory of God and not his personal glory. In the Renaissance, an artist's paintings were a way of expressing his religion and showing his devotion. Even with the scientific and astronomical advancements made at this time that sometimes challenged the views of the Church, religion still thrived. The papacy was a major power in Europe, acting as a politician as much as a religious leader. The Roman Catholic Church was a major patron of the arts, often commissioning paintings and sculptures to glorify the house of God. The growth of humanism also influenced the Church as it encouraged learning in all major field of study and helped provide the means to do so. The Renaissance developed a Church that was more open than it has been in the Middle Ages and influenced as much by the ideals of the time as it influenced art. The growth of the middle class, especially in Italy, meant the Church controlled members of important merchant families secured positions in the Church (Whitlock).

The Italian Renaissance gave way to a change in the way religious scenes were portrayed. The Middle Ages depicted religious scenes as set in the heavens, with golden backgrounds, circles of light, and flat undefined figures. The Renaissance not only saw a new, more accurate depiction of anatomy, but a setting that were earthly, putting a new emphasis on man. As seen in *The Entombment*, the setting is clearly earth with the grass and sky easily distinguishable in the background. Even the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* shows the figures surrounded by darkness and drapery instead of the golden glow seen in many earlier religious paintings.

With the advancements made in science and medicine, it wasn't only portraits that were more precise portrayals of the human anatomy. The precise detail of the human body seen in holy figures in religious Renaissance paintings is another testament to the rise of humanism at this time. Devotion to the church remained intact, but was now paired with belief in the abilities of man. The paintings above show devotion to anatomical detail. *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* shows the plump curves of the Christ child and the sharp features of both Catherine and Mary. *The Entombment* shows details in the muscles as they strain to hold Christ as well as the defined but limp muscles of Christ himself.

In the Middle Ages, biblical stories were often depicted in art so they could be understood by the illiterate masses. Though literacy increased, this art trend stayed throughout the Renaissance. The Church encouraged paintings and sculptures of saints to act as examples of faithful and pious lives. In both paintings above, important religious scenes are depicted (Whitlock).



The first illustrates the dream St. Catherine of Alexandria had where the Christ child presented her with a ring, making her his celestial spouse. This scene was popularly portrayed with the Virgin Mary and Joseph to complete the Holy family. They were often referred to as the “earthly trinity” a phrase in itself that expresses humanism. Like many depictions of saints, Catherine is painted with the object of her martyrdom, a barely visible spiked wheel in the lower left hand corner (Object Files).

The second, *The Entombment*, also known as *The Deposition*, is actually a portrayal of neither. With the cave of the Entombment on the left and the cross in the distance on the right, this is a transition scene between two often depicted events in Christian history. By painting the instance between two famous scenes, Raphael is able to display a flowing history and not merely a set of scenes. The lack of tell-tale golden halos also firmly plants the people in the painting as humans on earth carrying Christ, another show of humanist interests (Hartt).

As the Renaissance drew to a close and the Protestant Reformation and consequential Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church began, art continued to play an important role. Protestant artists’ work became more secular while the Church commissioned paintings of glorious depictions of saints, like Catherine, to draw people back to Catholicism.

Hartt, Frederick. *History of Italian Renaissance Art*. Fourth ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994. Print.

*Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*. *Ball State Museum of Art: Docent Handbook*. Ball State Museum of Art. Ball State University: Muncie, IN. Print.

*Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*. *Ball State University Museum of Art*. Ball State University. 2008. Web. Fall 2009.

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Strickland, Carol Ph.D., and John Boswell. *The Annotated Mona Lisa*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel P, 2007. Print.

Whitlock, Keith. *The Renaissance in Europe*. London: Yale University Press, 2000. 31-220. Print.



### Draft 3

#### Religion (Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine / Entombment of Christ)

The *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Simone Pignoni, 1635/1655, is a depiction of a biblical story that was well-known and much reproduced in the Italian Renaissance. This painting is typical of religious paintings in the Renaissance. Likewise, the portrayal of *The Entombment*, by Raphael, 1507, is also a well known religious story, this time depicted by the well known painter, Raphael. Both of these paintings could have been commissioned by the Church and used as examples of piety to the Christian community of Europe.

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During the Middle Ages, religious art was generally unsigned since the artist worked for the glory of God and not his personal glory. In the Renaissance, an artist's paintings were a way of honoring his religion and showing his devotion. Even with the scientific [\[embed link\]](#) and astronomical advancements made at this time that sometimes challenged the views of the Church, religion still thrived. The pope was a major power in Europe, acting as a politician as much as a religious leader. The Roman Catholic Church was a major patron of the arts, often commissioning paintings and sculptures to glorify the house of God. According to Albert Rabil, Jr., in his article on civic humanism, the growth of humanism [\[link\]](#) also influenced the Church as it encouraged learning in all major fields of study and helped provide the means to do so. The Renaissance gave way to a Church that was more open and accepting than it had been in the Middle Ages. It was influenced by the ideals of the time and in turn influenced art. The growth of the middle class, especially in Italy, meant many positions in the Church were filled by important merchant families (Rabil, 33-35).

The Italian Renaissance gave way to a change in the way religious scenes were portrayed. The Middle Ages depicted religious scenes as set in the heavens, with golden backgrounds, circles of light, and flat undefined figures. Artists of the Renaissance not only developed a new, more accurate depiction of anatomy, but settings in paintings were earthly, putting a new emphasis on man. As seen in *The Entombment* by Raphael, 1507, the setting is clearly earth with the grass and sky easily distinguishable in the background. Even the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* by Simone Pignoni, 1635/1655, shows the figures surrounded by darkness and drapery instead of the golden glow seen in many earlier religious paintings.

With the advancements made in science and medicine, it was not only portraits that were more precise portrayals of the human form. The precise detail of the human body seen in holy figures in religious Renaissance paintings is another testament to the rise of humanism at this time. Devotion to the Church remained intact, but was now paired with belief in the abilities of man. The paintings above show devotion to anatomical detail. *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* shows the plump curves of the Christ child and the sharp features of both Catherine and Mary. *The Entombment* shows details in the muscles of the figures as they strain to hold Christ as well as the defined but limp form of Christ himself. Raphael's painting clearly shows the influence of Michelangelo in the careful depiction of anatomy. It was common in the Renaissance for apprentices to study under master artists and learn to paint in their style, which is why similarities are so often seen between artists (Fiore).



In the Middle Ages, biblical stories were often depicted in art so they could be understood by the illiterate masses. Though literacy increased, this art trend endured throughout the Renaissance. According to Rabil, the Church encouraged paintings and sculptures of saints to inspire the faithful (Rabil, 36-38). In both paintings above, important religious scenes are depicted.

As stated in the Ball State University Museum sources, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* illustrates the dream St. Catherine of Alexandria had wherein the Christ child presented her with a ring, making her his celestial spouse. This scene was popularly portrayed with the Virgin Mary and Joseph to complete the Holy family. They were often referred to as the “earthly trinity” a phrase in itself that expresses humanism. Like many depictions of saints, Catherine is painted with the object of her martyrdom, a barely visible spiked wheel in the lower left hand corner (*Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* Docent Files). Another portrayal of Saint Catherine can be seen in the West Gallery of Ball State University Museum of Art. [link]

The second painting, *The Entombment*, also known as *The Deposition*, is actually a portrayal of neither. With the cave of the Entombment on the left and the cross in the distance on the right, this is a transition scene between two often depicted events in Christian history. By painting this moment between two famous scenes, Raphael is able to display a flowing history and not merely a set of scenes. The lack of tell-tale golden halos also firmly plants the people in the painting as humans on earth carrying Christ.

As the Renaissance drew to a close and the Protestant Reformation and subsequent Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church began, art continued to play an important role. Protestant artists’ work became more secular while the Church commissioned paintings of glorious depictions of saints, like Catherine, to draw people back to Catholicism.

Fiore, K H. "Raphael." *Galleria Borghese Official Website*. Ed. Spa Gerbart. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 Mar. 2010.

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Strickland, Carol Ph.D., and John Boswell. *The Annotated Mona Lisa*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel P, 2007. Print.

Rabil Jr, Albert. "The Significance of 'Civic Humanism' in the Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance." *The Renaissance in Europe*. Keith Whitlock. . London: Yale University Press, 2000. 31-220. Print.

## Draft 1

### Northern Renaissance (Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond / Arnolfini Wedding)

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* is a Northern Renaissance painting displaying the common theme of still life aspects with a biblical scene in the background. The second painting, *Arnolfini Wedding*, isn't technically a still life, but is one of the Northern Renaissance's best examples of still life technique. Still life artwork features non-living objects as the focus of the work of art. While the *Arnolfini Wedding* does indeed focus on two human figures, the detail and attention to the rest of the room and the objects in it are just as likely to draw your attention as the couple.

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Humanism affected the Northern countries just as it affected Italy. Along with humanist views was a renewed interest in the natural world. Artists took great care in depicting animals, plants, people, and objects. They used light and shadow, as seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, to give the objects of a painting three dimensions. Northern artists specialized in perspective techniques like *intuitive perspective* where artists painted further away objects smaller and closer together and *aerial perspective* which made further away objects blurry and less colorful. Both of these techniques gave depth and dimension to Northern Renaissance paintings. In the *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* the figures in the background are smaller, close together, and not depicted as sharply and detailed as the objects on the table are. This gives them the perspective of being further away from the viewer than the table.

Jan van Eyck is well-known for his technique with oil paint, so much that his patrons called it a science. Van Eyck's sharp and colorful images are built by many thin layers of oil glaze on a wooden panel, the brushstrokes nearly invisible. This is most famously seen in the *Arnolfini Wedding*. The portrait is of an Italian merchant couple celebrating either their wedding or betrothal. Apart from religious figures, the wealthy merchant class was the general subject for most non-still life paintings of the Northern Renaissance. They celebrated individuality and focused on nature to render their subjects as realistically as possible.

As cities became more populous, the public became interested in secular art. Merchant and middle class patrons wanted to express personal and civic pride, but this didn't mean that the Church was forgotten. Christianity still had a strong presence in Northern Renaissance Europe. The Church commissioned just as much art as the middle class to encourage renewed faith in the general public.

In Aertsen's still life, the influence of the Church is very evident. The scene in the background is when Christ blesses the bread of his two apostles, Simon and Cleopas, after his resurrection. This scene is re-enacting the events of the Last Supper, a well documented event in the art world. The objects on the table in the foreground also hold a religious significance. The lamb head represents Christ, the "lamb of God." Loaves of bread and fish recall how Christ fed many with only a few loaves of bread and some fish. Fruit, used to represent fertility in secular paintings, is shown here to represent the apple from the Garden of Eden and the subsequent need for Christ's



sacrifice for humanity's sins. The rose, with its prominent thorns, also harkens to the Garden of Eden where roses did not have thorns until after man had sinned. Onions and peas are staple foods of peasants, most often eaten during Lent, right before Christ's resurrection, and lavender grew in the field where Christ was crucified. Every object in this painting was carefully chosen by the painter to further represent the story in the background of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Pieter Aertson was considered by many the "father of still life" and painted many similar scenes to this one for his multiple patrons.

As with the Italian Renaissance, individualism was very important, and not just as the subjects of paintings and sculptures. Artists began signing their work much more frequently. In fact, according to Marilyn Stokstad in *Art History*, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, more names of artists are known than the time from the beginning of the Common Era to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. As seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, Jan van Eyck's signature appears on the wall over the mirror in the background.

Like *Kitchen Still Life*, *Arnolfini Wedding* uses ordinary objects as symbols, but unlike Aertson's work, van Eyck's symbolism is both religious and secular. The positions of the figures, the man near the window and the woman near the bed, denotes their positions in society. The mirror in the background shows the couple's wealth, but also acts as the eye of God. Prayer beads on the wall, the image of St. Margaret carved into the chair, and the single burning candle all represents the couple's piety. The fruit is both fertility and the sin of man, and the dog represents both fidelity and wealth. All of these seemingly random objects have one, if not several, meanings and were intentionally placed there by the artist.

Both of these paintings are prime examples of the artists who made them. Pieter Aertson was well-known and praised for his still lifes that mixed in religion to retell the stories of the bible. Jan van Eyck is revolutionary in his use of oil paint and realistic depiction of figures. Both artists rely heavily on symbolism to give their paintings deeper meaning and look to nature to give their figures depth, perspective, and realistic qualities.

*Ball State Museum of Art: Docent Handbook*. Ball State Museum of Art. Ball State University: Muncie, IN. Print.

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Nash, Susie. *Northern Renaissance Art*. First ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History: Third Edition*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson

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Strickland, Carol Ph.D., and John Boswell. *The Annotated Mona Lisa*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel P, 2007. Print.



## Draft 2

### Northern Renaissance (Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond / Arnolfini Wedding)

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* is a Northern Renaissance painting displaying a still life table with a biblical scene in the background. The second painting, *Arnolfini Wedding*, isn't technically a still life, but is one of the Northern Renaissance's best examples of still life technique. Still life artwork features non-living objects as the focus of the work of art. While the *Arnolfini Wedding* does indeed focus on two human figures, the detail and attention to the rest of the room and the objects in it are just as likely to draw the viewer's attention as the couple.

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Humanism affected the Northern countries just as it affected Italy. Along with humanist views came a renewed interest in the natural world. Part of the humanist movement, especially in the North, is the focus on nature. Artists look to the natural beauty of the world around them for inspiration and setting. They took great care in depicting animals, plants, people, and objects. Light and shadow is used, as seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, to give the objects of a painting three dimensions. Northern artists specialized in perspective techniques like *intuitive perspective* where artists painted distant objects smaller and closer together, and *aerial perspective* which made distant objects blurry and less colorful. Both of these techniques gave depth and dimension to Northern Renaissance paintings. In the *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond*, the figures in the background are smaller, close together, and not depicted as sharply and detailed as the objects on the table are. This gives the viewer the impression that the objects are further away from the viewer than the table.

As cities became more populous, the public became interested in secular art. Merchant and middle class patrons wanted to express personal and civic pride, but this didn't mean that the Church was forgotten. Christianity still had a strong presence in Northern Renaissance Europe. The Church commissioned art to encourage renewed faith in the general public.

In Aertsen's still life, the influence of the Church is very evident. The scene in the background is when Christ blesses the bread of his two apostles, Simon and Cleopas, after his resurrection. This scene is re-enactment of the events of the Last Supper, a well documented event in the art world. The objects on the table in the foreground also hold a religious significance. The lamb head represents Christ, the "lamb of God." Loaves of bread and fish recall how Christ fed many with only a few loaves of bread and some fish. Fruit, used to represent fertility in secular paintings, is shown here to represent the apple from the Garden of Eden and the subsequent need for Christ's sacrifice for humanity's sins. The rose, with its prominent thorns, also harkens to the Garden of Eden where roses did not have thorns until after man had sinned. Onions and peas are staple foods of peasants, most often eaten during Lent, right before Christ's resurrection, and lavender grew in the field where Christ was crucified (Object File). Every object in this painting



was carefully chosen by the painter to further represent the story in the background of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Pieter Aertson was considered by many the "father of still life" and painted many similar scenes to this one for his multiple patrons (Object File).

As with the Italian Renaissance, individualism was very important, and not just as the subjects of paintings and sculptures. Artists began signing their work much more frequently. In fact, according to Marilyn Stokstad in *Art History*, because more artists signed their work, scholars know the names of more artists in the 15<sup>th</sup> century than they did in several preceding centuries together. As seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, Jan van Eyck's signature appears on the wall over the mirror in the background. Eyck did not simply sign his name, but worked the signature into the painting and made it part of the art (Nash, p. 143).

A famous Dutch Northern Renaissance painter, Jan van Eyck, is well-known for his technique with oil paint, so much that his patrons called it a science. Van Eyck's sharp and colorful images are built by many thin layers of oil glaze on a wooden panel. The brushstrokes are nearly invisible. This is most famously seen in the *Arnolfini Wedding*. The portrait is of an Italian merchant couple celebrating either their wedding or betrothal. Apart from religious figures, members of the wealthy merchant class were the general subject for most non-still life paintings of the Northern Renaissance. They celebrated individuality and focused on nature to render their subjects as realistically as possible.

As with *Kitchen Still Life*, *Arnolfini Wedding* uses ordinary objects as symbols, but unlike Aertson's work, van Eyck's symbolism is both religious and secular. The positions of the figures, the man near the window and the woman near the bed, denotes their positions in society. The mirror in the background shows the couple's wealth, but also acts as the eye of God. Prayer beads on the wall, the image of St. Margaret carved into the chair, and the single burning candle all represents the couple's piety. The fruit is both fertility and the sin of man, and the dog represents both fidelity and wealth. All of these seemingly random objects have one, if not several, meanings and were intentionally placed there by the artist (Stokstad).

Both of these paintings are prime examples of the artists who made them. Pieter Aertson was well-known and praised for his still lifes that added religious aspects to retell the stories of the Bible. Jan van Eyck is revolutionary in his use of oil paint and realistic depiction of figures. Both artists rely heavily on symbolism to give their paintings deeper meaning, and look to nature to give their figures depth, perspective, and realistic qualities.

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond*. Ball State Museum of Art: Docent Handbook. Ball State Museum of Art. Ball State University: Muncie, IN. Print.



*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond. Ball State University Museum of Art.* Ball State University. 2008. Web. Fall 2009.

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond. Digital Images Delivered Online (DIDO).* Ball State University. Web. Fall 2009.

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond. Museum Object Files.* Ball State Museum of Art. Ball State University: Muncie, IN. Print.

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Strickland, Carol Ph.D., and John Boswell. *The Annotated Mona Lisa.* Kansas City: Andrews McMeel P, 2007. Print.

### Draft 3

#### Northern Renaissance (Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond / Arnolfini Wedding)

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond* by Pieter Aertson, 1551/1553, is a Northern Renaissance painting displaying a still life table with a biblical scene in the background. The second painting, *Arnolfini Wedding*, is not technically a still life, but is one of the best examples of Northern Renaissance still life technique. Still life artwork features non-living objects as the focus of the work of art. While the *Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan Van Eyck, 1434, does indeed focus on two human figures, the detail and attention to the rest of the room and the objects in it are just as likely to draw the viewer's attention as the couple.

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Humanism affected the Northern countries just as it affected Italy. According to Strickland and Boswell, along with humanist views came a renewed interest in the physical form and the natural world, in an attempt to visually record and reproduce nature through art. Artists took great care in depicting animals, plants, people, and objects. They used light and shadow, as seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, to give the objects of a painting three dimensions. Northern artists specialized in perspective techniques such as intuitive perspective where artists painted distant objects smaller and closer together, and aerial perspective which made distant objects blurry and less colorful (Strickland and Boswell, 32). Both of these techniques gave depth and dimension to Northern Renaissance paintings. For example, in the *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond*, the figures in the background are smaller, close together, and not depicted as sharply and detailed as the objects on the table. This gives the viewer the impression that the objects are further away from the viewer than the table.

These new methods in painting were influenced by the subject matter that was in demand at this time. As cities became more populous, the public became interested in secular art. Merchant and middle class patrons wanted to express personal and civic pride, but this didn't mean that the Church was forgotten. Christianity still had a strong presence in Northern Renaissance Europe. The Church commissioned art to encourage renewed faith in the general public.

Pieter Aertson, considered by many the "father of still life" painted *Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper of Emmaus Beyond* and other similar scenes where the influence of the Church is very evident. According to Ball State University Museum documents, the scene in the background is when Christ blesses the bread of his two apostles, Simon and Cleopas, after his resurrection. This scene is a re-enactment of the events of the Last Supper, that was famously painted by Leonardo da Vinci [[link to painting](#)]. The objects on the table in the foreground also hold a religious significance. The lamb head represents Christ, the "Lamb of God." Loaves of bread and fish recall how Christ fed many with only a few loaves of bread and some fish. Fruit, used to represent fertility in secular paintings, is shown here to represent the apple from the Garden of Eden and the



subsequent need for Christ's sacrifice for humanity's sins. The rose, with its prominent thorns, also harkens to the Garden of Eden where roses did not have thorns until after man sinned. Onions and peas are staple foods of peasants, most often eaten during Lent, right before Christ's resurrection, and lavender grew in the field where Christ was crucified. Every object in this painting was carefully chosen by the painter to further represent the story in the background of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection (*Kitchen Still Life with the Scene of the Supper at Emmaus* Docent File).

As with the Italian Renaissance, individuality was very important. Artists began signing their work much more frequently. In fact, according to Susie Nash, because more artists signed their work in Renaissance, more artists were recognized in this artistic period than any since the Greek and Roman periods. As seen in *Arnolfini Wedding*, depicted in detail in *Northern Renaissance Art*, Jan van Eyck's signature appears on the wall over the mirror in the background. Van Eyck did not simply sign his name, but worked the signature into the painting and made it part of the art (Nash, pp. 143).

As Stokstad explains in *Art History*, a famous Dutch Northern Renaissance painter, Jan van Eyck is well-known for his technique with oil paint, so much so that his patrons called it a science. Van Eyck's sharp and colorful images are built by many thin layers of oil glaze on a wooden panel. The brushstrokes are nearly invisible. This is most famously seen in the *Arnolfini Wedding*. The portrait is of an Italian merchant couple celebrating either their wedding or betrothal. Members of the wealthy merchant class were often the subject of non-still life paintings of the Northern Renaissance. Artists such as Van Eyck celebrated individuality and focused on the everyday world to render their subjects as realistically as possible.

Here Van Eyck uses ordinary objects as symbols, but unlike Aertson's work, the symbolism in the painting is both religious and secular. The positions of the figures, with the man near the window and the woman near the bed, denote their positions in society. The mirror in the background shows the couple's wealth, but also acts as the eye of God. Prayer beads on the wall, the image of St. Margaret carved into the chair, and the single burning candle all represent the couple's piety. The fruit is both fertility and the sin of man, and the dog represents both fidelity and wealth. All of these seemingly random objects have one, if not several, meanings and were intentionally placed there by the artist (Stokstad, pp. 599-601).

Both of these paintings are characteristic of the artists who made them. Pieter Aertson was well-known and praised for his still lifes that focused on religious symbolism to retell the stories of the Bible. Jan van Eyck was revolutionary in his use of oil paint and realistic depiction of figures. Both artists rely heavily on symbolism to give their paintings deeper meaning, and look to nature as well as common objects to give their figures depth, perspective, and realistic qualities. Aertson, Van Eyck, and many other artists of the Northern Renaissance were invaluable in developing still life as a genre and respected art form that focused on inanimate and nonhuman objects.

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond. Ball State Museum of Art: Docent Handbook.* Ball State Museum of Art. Ball State University: Muncie, IN. Print.

*Kitchen Still Life with a Scene of the Supper at Emmaus Beyond. Ball State University Museum of Art.* Ball State University. 2008. Web. Fall 2009.

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